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ACTION ARA-01

INFO LOG-00 ACDA-15 CIAE-00 C-01 DODE-00 HA-09 H-01  
INRE-00 INR-01 L-03 ADS-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 OMB-01  
PA-01 PM-01 PRS-01 P-01 SNP-01 SP-01 SS-01  
TRSE-00 T-01 USIE-00 /040W  
-----1453FD 281011Z /38

P 272202Z FEB 92  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8728  
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 02251

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR  
TAGS: PGOV, MARR, PINR, VE  
SUBJECT: MOD ON MILITARY ASSIGNMENT POLICY, CHAVEZ' TV  
APPEARANCE AND THE COUP PLOTTERS

1. (U) SUMMARY: IN FEBRUARY 26 TESTIMONY TO THE  
SENATE DEFENSE COMMITTEE, MOD GEN. FERNANDO OCHOA ANTICH  
SUGGESTED THAT THE GOV CHANGE THE PRACTICE OF ANNUALLY  
ROTATING SENIOR OFFICERS. HE ALSO PROVIDED ADDITIONAL  
INFORMATION ON THE COUP PLOTTERS. END SUMMARY.

CHANGE IN ASSIGNMENT POLICY  
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2. (U) ON FEBRUARY 26, MINISTER OF DEFENSE FERNANDO  
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OCHOA ANTICH TESTIFIED BEFORE THE SENATE DEFENSE  
COMMITTEE. HE RECOMMENDED THAT THE GOV CHANGE ITS  
POLICY OF ANNUALLY REASSIGNING SENIOR MILITARY  
OFFICERS. OCHOA, NOTING THAT FORMER PRESIDENT  
BETANCOURT HAD BEGUN THIS PRACTICE AFTER THE FALL OF  
PEREZ JIMENEZ IN 1958 SPECIFICALLY TO PREVENT A COUP,  
CLAIMED THAT THE SITUATION TODAY WAS DIFFERENT AND THAT  
THE GOV SHOULD THEREFORE CONSIDER CHANGING THIS POLICY.  
OCHOA ADDED THAT HE WAS NOT MAKING THIS PROPOSAL FOR  
PERSONAL REASONS, SINCE HE HIMSELF WOULD RETIRE IN A FEW  
MONTHS. (COMMENT: THE PRACTICE OF ANNUAL ROTATION OF

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON  
CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED  
DATE/CASE ID: 08 AUG 2006 200503206

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TOP COMMANDERS HAS IN ANY CASE ALWAYS ALLOWED FOR EXCEPTIONS. BETANCOURT HIMSELF HAD ONLY TWO DEFENSE MINISTERS IN FIVE YEARS; HIS SUCCESSOR RAUL LEONI HAD ONLY ONE IN HIS FIVE-YEAR TERM.)

## CHAVEZ' FEBRUARY 4 TV APPEARANCE

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3. (U) OCHOA ALSO INFORMED THE COMMITTEE ABOUT THE EVENTS OF FEBRUARY 4. ASKED FOR A CLARIFICATION OF WHY THE COUP LEADER, COMMANDER HUGO CHAVEZ FRIAS, HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO APPEAR LIVE ON NATIONAL TELEVISION THAT DAY, OCHOA EXPLAINED THAT HE HAD TRANSMITTED CAP'S ORDER TO RECORD CHAVEZ' STATEMENT AND TO TRANSMIT ONLY HIS VOICE--NOT HIS PICTURE; HOWEVER, IN THE CONFUSION OF THE MOMENT, THE ORDER HAD BEEN MISUNDERSTOOD. SOME COMMITTEE MEMBERS REPORTEDLY EXPRESSED DOUBTS ABOUT OCHOA'S VERSION OF WHAT HAPPENED AND HOW.

## THE COUP PLOTTERS

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4. (U) OCHOA CHARACTERIZED THE COUP PLOTTERS THEMSELVES AS "IDEOLOGICALLY TAINTED," BUT HE REFUSED TO IDENTIFY THEIR IDEOLOGY. HE ADDED THAT THERE WAS A STRONG ELEMENT OF "DISCONTENT" AMONG MEDIUM-LEVEL OFFICERS (LT. COLONELS, MAJORS, CAPTAINS AND LIEUTENANTS) OVER THE TERRIBLE CONDITIONS THEY HAD TO LIVE IN, AND OF RESENTMENT OF THEIR SUPERIORS AS RESPONSIBLE FOR SUCH CONDITIONS. OCHOA STATED THAT THESE OFFICERS NO LONGER BELIEVED IN THE HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY IN THE MILITARY. OCHOA EXPLAINED THAT MILITARY ORDERS HAD TRADITIONALLY BEEN BASED ON TWO ELEMENTS: ONE MORAL, THE OTHER AFFECTIVE. THESE NO LONGER EXISTED AND, CONSEQUENTLY, SENIOR OFFICERS WERE CALLED "CZARS" BY THEIR SUBORDINATES, WHO REFERRED TO THEMSELVES AS "SLAVES."

## COMMENT

5. (C) OCHOA'S RECOMMENDATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT CHANGE ITS POLICY OF ANNUALLY ROTATING SENIOR OFFICERS IS CURIOUS IN ITS TIMING. OCHOA'S EXPLANATION OF THE MIX-UP ALLOWING CHAVEZ TO APPEAR LIVE ON TV THE DAY OF THE COUP ATTEMPT WILL STRIKE MANY AS LAME. HIS STATEMENT ABOUT THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF MID AND

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LOWER-LEVEL OFFICERS ADDS NOTHING TO THE INFORMATION  
ABOUT THIS PROBLEM ALREADY IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN, BUT IS  
A USEFUL MARKER ABOUT THE NEED FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO DO  
SOMETHING TO HELP THEM (WHICH, IT APPEARS, IT HAS  
ALREADY BEGUN TO DO).  
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